DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 217 605 EC 142 488

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TITLE Mainstreaming the Regular Classroom Student.
PUB DATE 81
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitude Change; *Class Activities; *Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; *Mainstreaming; *Peer Acceptance; *Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

The paper presents activities, suggested by regular classroom teachers, to help prepare the regular classroom student for mainstreaming. The author points out that regular classroom children need a vehicle in which curiosity, concern, interest, fear, attitudes and feelings can be fully explored, where prejudices can be dispelled, and where the regular classroom student can learn and be comfortable with the realization that to be different and to be treated differently is natural. Among the 19 activities offered are the following: have children answer "what are you" questions; instruct students to make a collage of their strengths using drawings, clippings from newspapers, or pictures from magazines; make field trips to special education schools and classrooms; set up a learning center with biographies of some famous people who have overcome handicaps; and discuss feelings children consider to be negative or "bad." (SB)

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MAINSTREAMING THE REGULAR CLASSROOM STUDENT

What do you get when you add to three (3) commonly agreed upon goals of education - enhancement of the uniqueness of the individual, the teaching of academic and social skills, and the education of students to cope effectively with their perspective environments, the realization that separate education does not necessarily mean equal education, plus, the new federal legislation and court decisions mandating the civil rights of exceptional individuals? The answer, although not new or popular with parents and teachers, is "Mainstreaming." This is the educational system's attempt to normalize the experiences of exceptional children by integrating them as much as possible into the regular classroom so that both the exceptional and nonexceptional student might profit educationally and socially.

The laws and regulations are mandating more mainstreamed placements than before, but they do not automatically bring about positive changes in the attitudes and feelings of the regular classroom student towards their new mainstreamed exceptional classmates.

One of the crucial aspects of mainstreaming is that is might be profitable to both the exceptional and nonexceptional student in the same classroom. The success of mainstreaming will be dependent upon how well the regular classroom student accepts his/her new exceptional classmates and on how the exceptional classmates view the learning and social environment of the mainstreamed classroom. Students react to differences in behavior, appearance and teacher treatment of their classmates. Being ignored, frightened, anxious, frustrated, unwanted or treated as scapegoates does not provide a healthy learning environment for the mainstreamed exceptional child. All children have a need to be educated

EC 142488

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in a healthy classroom environment characterized by trust, security, tolderance, and a sense of belonging as well as autonomy. This type of environment must be created and maintained by the regular classroom teacher.

Since the implementation of present day mainstreaming, relatively little time has been spent preparing the regular classroom student for mainstreaming. This child is accustomed to being treated the same as his/her ppers - same grading system, same behavioral management techniques, same materials, same assignements, same teaching methods. Mainstreaming will change this idea of sameness because children will be treated differently and variations in academic achievement and potential, likes and dislikes, dispositions, mental assets and liabilities will be more diverse and unique in the mainstreamed classroom.

What regular classroom children will need is a vehicle in which curiosity, concern, interest, fear, attitudes and feelings can be explored fully, where prejudices can be dispelled and where the regular classroom student can learn and be comfortable with the realization that to be different and to be treated differently is natural.

The regular classroom environment will only be the least restrictive environment if all students are prepared to accept and understand as being natural, individual treatment and differences in the regular classroom. A proposed vehicle to achieve this type of environment would consist of active discussions where the regular classroom student is free to explore his/her attitudes and feelings. Discussions such as, "Everyone is different and it's nice to be different.So on Monday we will get a new student who is different." On Monday a student is wheeled in wearing leg braces and a shock helmet. This will not create a healthy learning environment for anyone. Children are more impressed with activities and discussions that

involve them rather than just discussions of facts and logic. Discussions where the best questions come from the students' own concerns, fears, and interests.

The following activities, suggested by mainstreamed regular classroom teachers, lend themselves to open discussions which can help prepare the regular classroom student for mainstreaming. It is suggested that during any discussion generated from the activities, individual differences be explained to children in a neutral value-free manner by answering children's questions directly and honestly. The teacher should try to anticipate questions as well as try to infer and deal with questions that are not asked.

1. After the students have completed the following activities, have group discussions concerning differences and explaining to the students that different answers mean different personalities, because people are different.

   a.) Explain to the class that they will divide into the following class grouping according to physical differences:

1. height	4. color eyes
2. weight	5. light skin
3. color hair	6. dark skin

   The teacher can make different combinations of any two or more categories.

   b.) Discussion of why some students are more athletic than others. Why some people are better liked than others.

   c.) Take students for a walk where a variety of free articles (nature items, pamphlets and brochures, samples, household or shop

scraps) are available. Each child chooses one item to bring back to class. Choices are kept secret until back in the room. Then children display their articles, telling why they wanted that certain item. Illustrates different likes and dislikes.

d.) Put a piece of paper on wall larger than tallest child. Mark on it the heights and widths of all children. Learn how or get nurse to do blood pressure and pulse readings of children. Put them on a chart. Illustrate: internal and external physical differences.

e.) From each child find out something in which he/she does not do well. Use as springboard for class discussion of how each can give and receive because all have strengths.

f.) Short story assignment: Each child composes a short story. A list of subjects is available for those who want an idea starter, but a student is free to use his own idea if he wishes. The story may be fact or fiction, as long or short as author chooses. Child may write or tape record it. Class discussion of differences shown in manner of presentation (written or recorded), subject matter, style, and any others that might be identified.

g.) "Who is he/she?" : Have children sit in a circle with the teacher. The teacher starts by describing someone in the room. (e.g., color hair, freckles or not, etc.) Children raise their hands and guess who it is. Student who guesses correctly, gets to describe someone else.

h.) "Guess my Favorites": Divide students into groups of two, each with pencil and paper. Have them each write down their favorite

color, food, t.v. show, etc., not showing each other what they've written. Then let them guess each other's answers.

i.) Have students draw and verbally describe their own self-portraits.

j.) Have students write answers to these questions or similar ones.

1. What is your favorite color?
2. What is your favorite food?
3. What is your favorite thing to do?
4. What is your favorite season of the year?
5. What animal would you most like to be?
6. What scares you the most?
7. What is your favorite song?
8. What makes you mad?
9. What makes you happy?
10. What makes you sad?

2. Ask students to cut pictures out of old magazines of things that are generally classified the same, but are different. Examples would be fruit, animals, furniture etc. Discuss the differences for example between an apple and an orange. Ask them which is their favorite. Then carry the discussion into people. Point out some people would rather be around certain people than others; just as they would prefer an apple to an orange: however, this doesn't mean that one is less special than another.

3. Social Silhouettes: Before this activity is begun, the class should have had a discussion about how easy it is to cut someone down, to criticize, and to belittle. There is much good in others that can be found if we look, and this activity involves looking at one another, seeing the good, and telling the other person about it. First

silhouttes would be made of each child in the class. (child stands between strong light source and piece of drawing paper, shadow is traced with pencil, cut out, and mounted on piece of paper with contrasting color) Every day post one of the silhouettes in the room and tell the class whose it is. At some time during the day, each child, except the one whose silhouette is featured, is to write what he or she sees as the best characteristics - the things that they like most - about the featured person. At the end of the day these statements would be compiled into a paragraph and posted with the silhouette in a very conspicuous place for the whole school to see.

4. "No names please": Have children fill out a ditto answering "what are you" questions. For example: What type of bird are you? What kind of weather are you? After everyone is finished, collect them and mix them up. Then pass them back out and have each child write a short a short positive paragraph on the type of person it is, whose paper they have or let the class discuss as a whole the kine of person it is, of course, not knowing who the person is. Keep it strictly positive.

5. Getting to Know You: One of the most important aspects of getting to know another person is the exchange of information. One of the causes of problems in relationships is the simple lack of information. When we don't know something about someone, we tend to fill in the vacuum with assumptions, fantasies, and unrealistic expectations. As we begin to know another person, it is important to get some of our "who" and "why" and "what" questions answered. A series of questions can be made up and used in several ways. Students can be asked to pick a partner and answer some or all of these questions; or, students

pick a partner, answer one or two questions chosen by the teacher, and pick another partner, and so on. This way each person gets to know a little more about a lot of other people. The questions could be duplicated on paper, written on the blackboard, or asked orally a few questions at a time. Some examples could be:

1. What is your favorite toy?
2. What are you most proud of?
3. Do you have a nickname and how do you feel about it?
4. What is the funniest thing that ever happened to you? the silliest? The most stupid?
5. What is your favorite book? Movie? T.V. show?
6. Who is your best friend of the same sex? Opposite sex? Why?
7. Name something you hate to do. What do you hate about it?
8. What do you like most about this class? the least?
9. How would you change this class to make it better?

6. <u>One Special Thing</u>: This exercise helps to build a sense of group rapport through the establishment of an environment for self-disclosure. The class is divided into pairs of students who are instructed to carry on a normal conversation for five minutes, telling his/her partner as much as possible about himself. The students are asked to pick those things about themselves that they think are important to share. After five minutes the class is asked to come back together again as one large group (preferably in a circle). Each student is asked to introduce his partner by stating his partner's name and the one special thing that impressed him as most important about that person. The discussion can end by asking the group to talk about what it is like to talk to the other person and what it was like to be talked about in the group.

7. Collage of Self: Instruct your students to make a collage entitled "Me!" Provide each student with a 12x18 sheet of heavy construction paper or thin cardboard. They should collect and cut out pictures, words, and symbols that are representative of themselves - things they like to do, things they own, things they would like to own, places they have been, people they admire, etc. Then they are to paste these pictures, words, and symbols onto their sheets of construction paper to make a collage. Instruct the students not to sign them. After the individual collages are completed, display them in the classroom. First, have the students try to guess who made each collage. Next have each student explain to the class all the items in his collage. Note for the class that the collages are all somewhat different - unique - just as each person, while having much in common with all others, is a different and unique individual.
8. Have students make a collage of their strengths using drawings, clippings from newspapers or pictures from magazines. The students could then share these with other members of the class. Each collage would be different but at the same time unique and accepting to other students. Or, have students make up an advertisement or commercial about themselves in which their strengths and assets are portrayed.
9. "A 'me' tree": Have students draw large "me trees" on newsprint or provide them with a ditto. On the roots, students write, draw symbols, or paste pictures of all their strengths and talents/ abilities--one strength or talent per root. On the branches, students write, draw symbols, or paste pictures of all their accomplishments and successes--one per branch. Some roots and branches should be left empty so that new elements can be added as they happen in the future. The students

place their names on the trunks of the "me tree" and post the completed trees around the room. Students may fill in the empty roots and branches whenever they develop a new strength or accomplish something new. Encourage students to observe that each person's strengths are different, but valuable.

10. Using community resources:

    a) Field trips to special education schools and classrooms and to agencies followed by discussions of attitudes and feelings about what they saw and heard.

    b) Invite speakers who are "different" into the classroom to discuss personal experiences, their area of exceptionality and their feelings about how they would like others to treat them.

11. A learning center could be set up with biographies of famous people who have overcome handicaps in some way; they had accepted themselves in some way and went on to attain previously insurmountable goals. For the children who choose not to read, or cannot, a buddy system could be set up so each child would have the opportunity to learn and gain knowledge in his own way. Sharing would become a part of learning about differences. Tapes could be a part of the center, so those choosing to listen to a story may do so; books would be on many different reading levels. If a child has his own "hero," he may research a person of his choice providing that particular personality fits in with the theme of our "unit" such as Franklin Roosevelt, Ludwig van Beethoven, Helen Keller, Jill Kilmont. After children have gained knowledge about their famous person, they may share it with the class in some way; drawing pictures, a report, a short skit, etc. Several children may even choose to present their personality together to the class.

Discussion would follow the presentation of the famous person and the merits of that person would be brought out.

12. Reading aloud books and stories that deal with differences helps children understand the special needs of others.

13. One of a Kind--Art: Start by creating a piece of "art" in front of the class. Don't worry about the quality of the finished product--the uniqueness of the creation is what counts. If you are "uptight" about this, practice one ahead of time. All you need is a piece of drawing paper and several colors of crepe paper and a stapler or some paste. Get the children's attention and then proceed to tear various colors of crepe paper into jagged free-form patterns which you then mount on the drawing paper. You may make a picture, but you'd probably be better off to create a simple design or an abstract expression. It should only take five minutes or less to put together something reasonably attractive and unique. Talk to the class and have fun while you are working. When you have finished your masterpiece, ask: "Have you ever seen this before? One exactly like this?" Lead the children to discuss the fact that what you did was create a piece of art. It would be impossible to duplicate the exact creation because the same tears in the paper could not be made, the same paper could not be used, etc. A "picture" that looks like yours could be made but it would not be the same work of art. After you have completed the discussion, ask the children to create their own "masterpeices." Permit them to choose between using crepe paper, construction paper, crayons, or magic markers. Allow them to compare them with each others'. Ask if any are the same. They should realize that each work of art is one of a kind. When

they pretty well understand what you are talking about, you should ask: "Can any of these same ideas we've talked about be applied to human beings?" Again, lead them to a gradual realization through their own thinking that each of them is different, each unique, each irreplaceable and impossible to duplicate.

14. One of a Kind--Fingerprints: Have the children divide themselves into groups of five and supply them with an ink pad. After cautioning them about getting ink on their clothing, ask them to make their fingerprints by first pressing their fingers on an ink pad and then on a sheet of white paper. The best print is obtained by rolling the finger from left to right without squeezing down too hard. Using magnifying glasses, have them carefully study and compare each others' prints. After they have done this, ask the children if they have any ideas of why everyone's fingerprints are unique and different.

15. The Magic Box: Construct a "magic box" which can be any kind of a box with a mirror placed so as to reflect the face of anyone who looks inside. Begin the activity by asking the class, "Who do you think is the most special person in the whole world?" After allowing the children to respond with their individual answers, you may then continue, "Well, I have a magic box with me today, and each of you will have a chance to look inside and discover the most important person in the world." Give each child a chance to look into the box after you ask them who they think they will see. Some children may have to be coaxed because they may not believe what they see. Be ready with some of the following comments: "Are you surprised?" "You smiled so big--like you're happy to see that you're the special person." Before rejoining the class, ask each child to

keep the special news a secret. After all the children have had their turns, ask the group who the most special person was. After each child has had an opportunity to say "me," explain that the box is valuable because it shows that each of them is a special person. You might then want to ask how it is possible for everyone to be the special person. A discussion about each individual's uniqueness should ensue.

16. Ask students to list three things which describe them best. Allow them to read these lists aloud. Ask why they have different answers, should they have different answers, and is it right to be different?
17. Ask students to write what they do best, and also what they cannot, but would like to be able to do. Discuss the concept that since people are different, some are better at certain things than others, but everybody has something they can do well.
18. Using spontaneous dramatic play and role playing, children can be helped to identify with the needs of others (e.g., using crutches, walkers, or hearing aids; crawling or limping, etc.).

All children must be encouraged to talk about feelings such as guilt, fear, and anger, with the teacher trying to help these children begin to understand their emotions and feelings.

19. <u>Voting on Negative Feelings</u>: It is necessary to discuss negative or "bad" feelings if one is to develop a healthy self-concept. If a child thinks some of his feelings of hostility, agression, anger and hate are unnatural or "bad," he will begin to perceive himself as bad or unnatural. Being able to talk about these feelings in the group has two positive effects on the child's self-image. First, it provides him with an opportunity to defuse some of the feelings

by talking them out rather than acting them out in a potentially destructive way. Second, as a child sees that he is not the only one who sometimes wishes his older brother were dead or gets angry with his parents, he will see that his feelings are natural and common responses to similar emotional situations that he shares with his classmates. He will discover that is is acceptable to have these feelings--that is is "OK" to be the person he is. He is a unique individual, yet is also like all the others. To get at negative feelings, let students "vote" by raising their hands to indicate their experience with some of the following types of common childhood problems. Ask such questions as:

How many of you:

Are afraid of ghosts?

Ever get scared?

Like to get angry?

Are afraid when your parents get angry?

Are afraid when your parents fight?

Like to be teased? Sometimes tease others?

Feel that life could be better for you?

Find it easy to make friends?

Are afraid to be near someone who is blind or deaf or in a wheel chair?

The successfully mainstreamed classroom will be composed of exceptional and nonexcpetional students who are learning social, academic and life skills in a healthy learning environment. This environment can be created, by preparing the regular classroom teacher, the exceptional students and the regular classroom student for the challenges and benefits of mainstreaming.